

Which Ways of Reducing Risks are Best?

Ongoing patient monitoring will increase bed safety. Many patients go through a period of adjustment when new options are used. Patients and their families should talk to their health care team to find out which options are best for them.

Patient or Family Concerns About Bed Rail Use

If you have concerns about using bed rails:

- Talk to your health care team to find out if bed rails are needed.
- Be reassured that many patients can sleep safely without bed rails.

A Guide to Bed Safety for Patients and Families

Bed Rails in Hospitals, Nursing
Homes and Home Health Care:
THE FACTS

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<http://vaww.ncps.med.va.gov> (734) 930-5890
VISN 8 Patient Safety Center of Inquiry
<http://www.patientsafetycenter.com> (813) 558-3911

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Bed Rail Entrapment Statistics

Two and a half million hospital beds are in use in the United States. Between 1985 and 1999, 371 patients* were trapped in beds with rails. Of these, 228 died, 87 were hurt but did not die, and 56 were not hurt. Most patients were frail, elderly or confused.

Patient Safety

Patient assessment by the health care team will help to find out how best to keep patients safe. Patients who have problems with memory, sleeping, incontinence, pain, uncontrolled body movement or weakness must be assessed for ways to keep them from harm.

Historically, physical restraints, like vests, were thought to keep some patients safe in hospitals. However, health care providers learned that restraints can be dangerous. Bed rails are sometimes incorrectly used as restraints. Experts now encourage health care providers to give safe care without restraints. Restraints should only be used when medically indicated.

The Benefits and Risks of Bed Rails

Potential benefits of bed rails include:

- Helping patients to turn while in bed.
- Providing a hand-hold for getting into or out of bed.
- Providing a feeling of comfort and safety.
- Lowering the risk of falling out of bed when being transported in bed.
- Providing easy reach to bed controls and personal care items.

Potential risks of bed rails may include:

- Strangling, suffocating, other injury or death when patients are caught between rails or between the bed rails and mattress.

- Serious injuries from falls when patients climb over rails.
- Skin bruising, cuts, and scrapes.
- Restless behavior when bed rails are used as a restraint.
- Feeling isolated or restricted.
- Preventing patients who are able to get out of bed, from going to the bathroom or getting something from a closet.

Meeting Patients' Needs for Safety

Most patients can be in bed safely without bed rails. Health care providers can keep patients safe by:

- Using beds that can be raised and lowered close to the floor to keep both patients and health care workers safe.
- Keeping the bed in the lowest position with wheels locked.
- Placing mats on the floor next to the bed, as long as the patient is not at risk of tripping on the mat.
- Teaching patients to use transfer or mobility aids.
- Monitoring patients frequently.
- Anticipating the reasons patients get out of bed such as hunger, thirst, going to the bathroom, restlessness and pain. Those needs can be met by offering food and fluids, scheduling frequent toileting, and providing calming interventions and pain relief.

When bed rails are used, health care providers can perform an ongoing assessment of the patient's physical and mental status and closely monitor high-risk patients. Providers can keep patients safe by:

- Lowering one or more sections of the bed rail, such as the foot rail.
- Using a proper size mattress or mattress with raised edges to prevent patients from being trapped between the mattress and rail.
- Reducing the gaps between the mattress and side rails.

* In this brochure, the term "**patient**" refers to a resident of a nursing home, any individual receiving services in a home care setting, or patients in hospitals.



For More Information, Call: (813) 558-3911